

NIEHS ends weeklong Earth Day celebration with local highway adoption

By Ian Thomas

NIEHS concluded its weeklong celebration of Earth Day April 26 by adopting the 1.2-mile stretch of Hopson Road between the main campus and Keystone building in Research Triangle Park (RTP), N.C. As part of the Adopt-A-Highway Program, the effort is intended to reduce litter on North Carolina roadsides, and help preserve the natural beauty of the state.

“This program lets our employees take an active and immediate part in protecting our environment,” said Paul Johnson, a member of the NIEHS Environmental Awareness Advisory Committee, who donned an orange vest with several of his colleagues to pick up trash. “At the same time, it also sets the example for our community that it’s up to us to keep our home beautiful.”

Established in 1988, as a response to growing public concerns on litter, the [Adopt-A-Highway Program](http://www.ncdot.gov/doh/operations/dp_chief_eng/roadside/beautification/highway/) (http://www.ncdot.gov/doh/operations/dp_chief_eng/roadside/beautification/highway/) is managed by the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and currently hosts representatives from government and private-sector entities across the state.

A week of education

In addition to the highway adoption, NIEHS staff members were treated to a number of other educational events throughout the week. Among them was a seminar, “The effects of invasive plant species in the aquatic environment,” by Rob Emens, an aquatic plant specialist with the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR). The hour-long talk explained how certain invasive plant species, such as Hydrilla, can have devastating ecological effects on local lakes and waterways.

“I had no idea how quickly some of these species could displace the native plants in a given ecosystem,” noted Johnson. “That really underscores the sophistication of the world around us, and how interconnected everything is.”

Other activities included participation in the RTP Electronics Recycling Day, and a live music and entertainment event at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency RTP campus.

Earth Day, every day

As the week drew to a close, NIEHS and its members were reminded that, while Earth Day is only recognized once a year, its message should resonate year-round.

“Earth Day is a time to reflect on the progress we’ve made in protecting our environment, and to anticipate the challenges still facing us on the road to a sustainable future,” said NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D. “For NIEHS and its mission, therefore, every day is Earth Day.”

(Ian Thomas is a public affairs specialist with the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison and a regular contributor to the Environmental Factor.)



Adopt-A-Highway participants, from left, Paul Johnson, Bill Willis, Ian Thomas, Maggie Humble, Molly Puente, Ph.D., and Cindy Innes (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Spencer, left, and Hall handled cleanup duties near the Keystone building. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Rob Emens, from NCDENR, gave a seminar on the effects of invasive plant species in the aquatic environment, as part of the Earth Day celebration. (Photo courtesy of Rob Emens)



Birnbaum applauds NIEHS efforts to increase sustainability, and promises more to come. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

NIEHS Sustainability Highlights

NIEHS is a three-time U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Green Champion Award winner, for ongoing green initiatives, such as:

- Robust recycling program
- Hybrid vehicles in fleet
- Energy star-enabled IT equipment
- Cafeteria composting
- Telework for employees
- Carpools, vanpools, subsidized public transportation
- On-site shuttle
- Webcasting and greener meetings
- Reduced printing and printed materials
- Waterless urinals, low-flow showerheads/faucets, etc.
- Occupancy sensors for lighting

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